DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 213 382 HE 014 912

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TITLE	Short Range Stabilization Actions: Good But Not Enough.
PUB DATE	6 Mar 82
NOTE	17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Higher Education (Washington, DC, March 6, 1982).
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Administrative Policy; Admissions Counseling; Alumni; Change Strategies; College Administration; *College Admission; *College Choice; College Planning; College School Cooperation; Decision Making; Departments; *Enrollment Trends; Governance; Higher Education; Management Information Systems; Publications; *Student Recruitment; Student Volunteers
IDENTIFIERS	*Institutional Vitality; *State University of New York Coll at Geneseo

ABSTRACT

An alternative approach to achieve short-time enrollment stabilization based in part on experiences at the State University of New York, Geneseo, is described. It is suggested that a short-range effort will not be enough to assure institutional vitality in the difficult years ahead. Short-range stabilization should be followed by the integration of enrollment decision-making with campus governance. Among the programs implemented in 1977-78 at the university are the following: an admissions internship program, adjunct recruiter program, student volunteer admissions program, alumni volunteer admissions program, communications program, and departmental liaison program. A mailing program was designed so that each applicant received something from the college every week, including information on housing, a financial aids brochure, special edition of the student newspaper, and a career planning brochure. In 1978 and 1979, increased acceptances of admission offers occurred, and the quality of the freshman class climbed. The most important by-product of short-range stabilization is the development of a comprehensive management information system on enrollment. However, recruiting and retention decision-making continued to be largely a peripheral matter insofar as campus governance was concerned. Efforts to integrate it through liaison systems, diverse committee memberships, and continuous communication were only partially successful. Structural changes designed to integrate enrollment decision-making with campus governance are outlined. (SW)

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ED213382

American Association of Higher Education

Annual Meeting

Washington, D. C.

Friday, March 6, 2:15 - 3:45 p.m.

"Short Range Stabilization Actions: Good But Not Enough"

by

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Note: The ideas and techniques advanced in this paper are to be developed in greater depth in a forthcoming monograph by F.R. Kemerer, J.V. Baldridge, and K.C. Green entitled Strategies for Effective Enrollment Management to be published by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

"Short Range Stabilization Actions:
Good But Not Enough"

by

Frank R. Kemerer

The controversial issue of whether or not there will be a net enrollment decline for higher education in this decade will not be resolved until the figures are tabulated. But for many public and private colleges and universities, the answer is already in: enrollments have seriously declined. What can an institution do when faced with an enrollment shortfall? One approach is to send administrators to as many recruiting and retention workshops advertised in The Chronicle of Higher Education as possible and at the same time promote the campus through a blizzard of brochures, radio spots, posters, and the like. Not only are such methods dangerously close to panic-induced hucksterism, they also constitute a serious drain on already strained resources. A campus experiencing enrollment declines is in no position to spend time and money foolishly.

The first part of this paper sets forth an alternative approach to achieve short-term enrollment stabilization. It is based in part on the author's experiences at one State University of New York campus and in part on a continuing study of enrollment management concepts and techniques. Even though a successful short-range effort can pay handsome dividends, it will not be enough to assure institutional vitality in the tough years ahead, a point advanced in the second part. Unless short-range stabilization is followed by the integration of enrollment decision making with campus governance, the institution is likely to realize only a short respite from

enrollment problems. Not capitalizing on the fruits of short-range stabilization will truly be a missed opportunity, carrying potentially serious consequences for institutional survival.

ENROLLMENT SHORTFALL: A CASE IN POINT

The State University of New York (SUNY) College of Arts and Science at Geneseo is one of thirteen arts and science colleges in the 29-campus state-operated SUNY system. It is located in the Village of Geneseo on the slopes of the Geneseo Valley in Upstate New York, about 30 miles south of Rochester and 70 miles east of Buffalo. Like its sister institutions, Geneseo began as a teacher preparation school, then transformed itself into a liberal arts college awarding bachelors and masters degrees. Largely residential, the campus boosted an enrollment of about 5300 FTE by the mid-1970s, up sharply from the 2000 students of a decade before. Most of its students come from the western part of the state, with a growing percentage coming from the metropolitan New York City area.

Enrollment Problems Surface

In 1971, the campus granted admission to about 46 percent of the total number of freshman applicants. But by 1975, the percent being admitted had dramatically increased to 84 percent. This increase was necessary in order to maintain a freshman class size of about 1200 students. Thus, as early as 1973 the figures showed that the "yield" of enrolled students from those being granted admission had declined significantly. Apparently, more and more students were choosing the college as a back-up institution.

From the fall of 1975 to the fall of 1977, the recruitment situation worsened. The number of applicants in the applicant pool declined by nearly 1000, and as a result, the size of the freshman class dropped by 400 students. A simultaneous decline in the number of transfer students enrolling left the college 500 students short. What was particularly disturbing about this event was that the number of high school graduates in New York State was continuing to increase! No significant decrease was expected until the end of the decade. If Geneseo was already experiencing declines, what would happen then?

Equally disturbing was the fact that the financial collapse of New York City in 1975 had ushered in a period of retrenchment in SUNY. From 1975 to 1977, a total of 2500 positions were deleted form the University's budget. Of these, 163 were faculty and 83 were professional staff members. Could Geneseo recoup its loses in sufficient time to avoid having to retrench a large number of employees?

Stabilization Actions Are Initiated

At the initiation of the office of the president, a broad-based Task Force on Recruitment and Retention was established in the spring of 1977. This Task Force, conducting its work through subcommittees, focused on recruiting in the spring of that year, with retention matters deferred until the next fall. This paper will focus only on the former. Among its first recommendations was the structural realignment of the office of admissions with the office of the president. The president accepted this recommendation, broadening it to include the offices of financial aid, career

planning and placement, and student orientation. The executive assistant to the president was given the responsibility of administering the new unit, called College Enrollment Policy and Planning (CEPP), along with shared responsibility with the vice president of academic affairs for the office of institutional research. The president agreed with members of the Task Force that only structural realignment could assure high priority for recruiting, admissions, and retention matters, given the climate of retrenchment. The president also accepted a Task Force recommendation that a new department of publications be established in the office of college relations to coordinate the development and administration of a college-wide publications program.

A three-day retreat, paid for in part by the SUNY Chancellor's Office, was held in the summer of 1977 for 40 key administrators, tenured and nontenured faculty members, and students to debate the preliminary recommendations of the Task Force and future mission of the college. If nothing else, this carefully planned sequence of discussions promoted awareness among representatives of campus constituencies that enrollment problems existed and were serious. A fall faculty convocation together with dissemination of the summer conference resource documents and position papers kept the issue alive among all members of the campus community. Not only was understanding enhanced, the suggestions advanced through these many avenues served to promote a <u>positive</u> attitude toward dealing with the problem. Up to this time, the campus had been content to have a purposes and priorities committee prepare suggestions for adapting the college to a steadily shrinking student body. The president, his key

advisors, and members of CEPP continually asserted that the college could assert considerable control over its destiny -- if members of the campus community would pull together.

Central to the stabilization action were efforts by the new director of admissions (the previous director had retired) to revitalize the office of admissions. Beginning with an internal operations audit, actions were taken to achieve differentiated staffing, to streamline the flow of paperwork, and to assess staff effectiveness. At the same time, a host of programs was being developed by CEPP administrators to beef up recruiting in light of research findings now being reported by the office of institutional research. Numerous programs were implemented in the fall and winter of 1977-78. Space precludes describing more than a few of the more notable:

1. An Admissions Internship Program: This program provided a much needed increase in admissions staffing at low cost. At the same time, it offered an opportunity for the college's graduates interested in student service work to attain experience. Two interns were selected from a number of applicants by a screening committee. They were expected to function as full-fledged admissions officers under the supervision of the director of admissions. Each was paid a stipend of $3000, given room and board in campus housing, and an opportunity for tuition-free graduate study at a sister institution.

2. An Adjunct Recruiter Program: This vastly increased school-by-school recruiting efforts by drawing on the services of those administrators who previously had had some admissions office experience. Seven administrators were able to be released from regular duties for one to two weeks of re-recruiting. The seven were given an orientation program and appropriate materials; all scheduling was handled by the office of admissions.
3. The Student Volunteer Admissions Program: Some 125 students, mostly freshmen and sophomores, agreed to meet with interested high school students over the Christmas and spring breaks in their hometown communities to acquaint them with campus life. These volunteers were given an orientation program, appropriate materials and the names and addresses of students who had either applied or expressed some interest in the college. Letters were also sent to high schools in their communities indicating the volunteers would be available to meet with interested students.
4. The Alumni Volunteer Admissions Program: Later, the same approach used with student volunteers was used to assemble an enthusiastic alumni group to do field work on behalf of the college.
5. Communications Program: New equipment including dictaphones for counselors, small unit continuous tape players, and word processing equipment vastly increased person-to-person communication. Various categories of names and addresses were placed

on computer tape for instant retrieval and correspondence. A publication program for admissions office stationery, campus viewbook, and similar items was developed with rapid turn-around time. Later, the program was expanded to include brochures for every academic department. A telephone watts line was added. Later, high school and transfer counselor newsletters were started, as was a Director's Newsletter circulated to members of the campus community. Members of CEPP put together a high school counseling program called "Is College in Your Future?" to be presented at area high schools on an invitational basis.

6. Departmental Liaison Program: Each academic department was asked by the president to name one person to work with the office of admissions in corresponding with interested students, providing department tours, and planning brochures. This program received high visibility through orientation sessions and social events hosted by the president.

The Results

Despite quadrupling the number of high school visits in the fall of 1977 and the winter of 1978, the applicant pool continued to decline.

This was not unexpected, since the timeframe was so short. Later, the new effort paid off handsomely in this respect, as the figures for 1979 and 1980 indicate.

Because the applicant pool had not increased, an aggressive reinforcement effort was begun to coincide with the end of the prime recruiting

period, continuing until late spring when applicants had to decide where they would enroll. A mailing program was designed so that each applicant received something from the college every week. In the past, a huge packet had been sent when a student was admitted, with little sent out thereafter. A few of the items mailed included housing information with a covering letter from the director of housing, a specially prepared financial aids brochure, a special edition of the student newspaper, and a career planning brochure with a covering letter from the dean of career planning and placement. The reinforcement campaign culminated in a first-class, all-day open house at which faculty and the administration, including the president, were highly visible.

The statistics show that the real payoff that first year came in the large jump in percent accepting their offers of admission. The yield increased again in 1979. At the same time the number of students applying only to Geneseo in the SUNY system rose sharply, reaching a 127 percent increase in the three-year period from 1977-1980.

These applicants are particularly welcome, since the enrollment yield of single applicants is almost double that of non-single applicants. Even more pleasing, the quality of the freshman class steadily climbed until by 1980, the mean SAT scores reached 1017, the best since 1977, and the high school average reached 86.2, equalling that of 1973. At this moment, Geneseo is experiencing its best year in recruiting to date, despite declines in annual numbers of high school graduates in New York State.

An Important By-Product

The most important by-product of short range stabilization is the development of a comprehensive management information system on enrollment. Without such information, administrators have little but gut reactions to steer them. Enrollment research is not a one-time effort but a continuous operation to monitor external and internal conditions. Figure 2 outlines the two types of data to be produced. As indicated in the figure, some information must be generated annually, while other information should be obtained periodically in the interest of systematic evaluation of campus programs and services. Most institutions have the capability to develop such an enrollment information system on their own without spending precious dollars on outside consulting firms to do this for them. And, with some administrative adjustment, institutions can likewise draw on their own talent to mount an effective marketing program. Indeed, the decision to "farm out" research and marketing to a public relations firm may in many instances be a sign that the campus cannot or will not take the necessary steps to put its own house in order.

Simply getting the data and then confining it to the boundaries of the admissions office is like clapping with one hand. For effective enrollment management to occur, all components of the institution--from the presidents office to the philosophy department--should utilize the information in decision making. However, if the institution does nothing more than engage in short-range stabilization actions, it is unlikely the data generated will stray very far beyond the office of institutional research and office of admissions. Such seemed the situation at Geneseo.

Figure 1: ENROLLMENT RESEARCH

A. Annual Baseline-Line Information

1. Trend data (5 years) on number in applicant pool, number and percent admitted, and number and percent enrolled (yield) by:
   a. Freshman, transfers, graduates
   b. Sex and race
   c. Department/school
   d. High school GPA rank
   e. SAT/ACT scores (quality index)

2. Trend data as above on drop-outs

3. Trend data on student majors by department/school

4. Names and addresses of stalled students by department/school

B. Attitudinal Information*

1. Survey of freshman, transfer, graduate applicants to determine what factors prompted them to make application (Periodically)
   a. Directory information (sex, age, HSA, HSR, etc.)
   b. Reasons for applying
   c. Relative weight of inducement factors
   d. Comparison with competitors

2. Survey of admitted students who did not enroll** (Periodically)
   a. Directory information
   b. Reasons for not enrolling

3. Survey of newly enrolled students (Annually)
   a. Directory information
   b. Reasons for enrolling

B. Attitudinal Information (continued)

4. Survey of high school and transfer counselors (Periodically)
   a. Image of institution
   b. Evaluation of recruiting compared with competition
   c. Evaluation of information about campus and programs

5. Survey of Drop Outs*** (Annually)
   a. Directory information
   b. What doing now?
   c. Factors causing drop out
   d. Attitude toward campus services

6. Survey of enrolled students (Periodically)
   a. Directory information
   b. Attitude toward campus services

7. Survey of graduates (Annually)
   a. Directory information
   b. What doing now?
   c. Reactions to college
   d. Suggestions for change

* Survey instruments are available from such groups as NCHEMS and ETS; where appropriate, local instruments can also be used. When time and money preclude conducting a comprehensive study, telephone surveys can serve as a stop-gap measure

** A separate survey of single applicants can be conducted--will highlight public-private differences.

*** Can be separated into dismissals and non-dismissals. Also can do a talent loss survey--those with a high GPA who did not return.

GOOD BUT NOT ENOUGH

Despite all of the activity and its positive results, members of CEPP were disturbed by the fact that recruiting and retention decision making continued to be largely a peripheral matter insofar as campus governance was concerned. Efforts to integrate it through liaison systems, diverse committee memberships, and continuous communication were only partially successful. Patterns of campus decision making remained much as usual. Academic and student services program development were not as tutored as they might have been in terms of their impact on recruitment and retention.

Two members of the CEPP unit wrote a paper in 1978 on how this blind spot could be remedied. Entitled "The Internal Dimensions of Institutional Marketing,"* the article argues that only through significant organizational restructuring can enrollment management become successful in the long run. Central to this thesis is the creation of a new top-level administrative position (or redefinition of an existing one), tentatively identified as the vice president for institutional advancement. The person holding this position would coordinate institutional planning and also would have line responsibility for offices closely related to student recruitment and retention. Offices which might fall into this category include admissions

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*William L. Caren and Frank R. Kemerer, "The Internal Dimensions of Institutional Marketing," College and University, Spring, 1979, pp. 173-188.

and recruiting, financial aid, news and information, publications, institutional research, fund raising, alumni affairs, and career planning and placement.* Figure 2 provides the contrast between short-range stabilization actions and structural changes designed to integrate enrollment decision making with campus governance.

Most corporate organizations have high-ranking officers and committees linking internal planning and resource allocation to the realities of the external world. So too must colleges and universities shed their "ivory tower" governance character in favor of a more open systems administrative configuration. The logic for doing so is clear; the means to bring it about without creating internal disruption are not. It may be, however, that colleges and universities which have undertaken short range stabilization action will find their constituencies more willing to accept structural change in the interest of converting short range gains into lasting patterns.

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*The details of such an amalgamation are discussed in the "Internal Dimensions" article previously referenced.

Figure 2: STAGES OF COLLEGE ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

	Stage I: Stabilization	Stage II: Integration
Purpose	1. Halt enrollment decline to allow for planning and reorganization 2. Increase faculty awareness of the problem	Integrate enrollment management with campus administration
Scope	1. Focus on student recruitment (increase applicant pool and/or enrollee yield) 2. Focus on student retention (decrease attrition)	Structural relationship of enrollment planning and recruiting/retention-related functions to central administration and deliberative bodies
Method	Broad-based task force a. Established jointly by senate, administration, student government b. Support services provided c. Short reporting timeframe (3-6 months)	1. Reorganization of campus administration through: a. New office at vice president level b. Reallignment of existing vice president office to accommodate enrollment management 2. Establishment of a Planning Committee a. Relates decisions about academic programs and student services to enrollment shifts
Result	1. Enrollment data base established 2. Increase awareness among campus constituencies 3. Recommendations tailored to institutional and individual realities	1. Continuous monitoring of external environment 2. Program and service changes are linked to enrollment shifts